

THE MINING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

March, 1941 - January, 1944

Two important legislative enactments came into force during the period under review, namely (a) The Mining (Petroleum) Act which came into operation on the gazetting of a proclamation on 31st July, 1941, and (b) The Mining Act Amendment Act, 1941.

The former of these Acts is designed to place the search for oil on a sound and scientific basis, and to check the wasteful expenditure of capital that has occurred in the past principally because of the inadequate preliminary examination of the areas within which the sites of boreholes have been selected more or less arbitrarily. By a complete revision of the pre-existing legislation provision has now been made for the acquisition of titles over large areas in the first place and progressively smaller areas as the work of initial investigation by competent men proceeds. Unfortunately the continuance of the war has militated against the conduct of prospecting operations by those interests which are experienced in this kind of exploratory work and are also possessed of the resources necessary for the prosecution of the search. The Government has, however, by placing this legislation on the statute books, removed one serious obstacle to the introduction of capital, and it is known that major interests are prepared to work energetically under Acts that are similar to that which is now in force in South Australia.

The Amending Mining Act of 1941 is concerned entirely with the restoration of the major part of the Act of 1931 which was passed originally for a period of five years and ceased to have effect on 30th June 1936. This legislation is concerned with the control of entry upon private lands beneath which the minerals have been alienated from the Crown, and the time limit previously imposed has been dropped. The unworkable legislation dealing with mining on private property has been repealed and the procedure now necessary

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to acquire titles is simplified, while due provision has been made for protecting the interests of the private landholders. The experience gained during the five years' currency of the Act when it was first brought into force showed that there was a demand for such legislation and that no hardship was caused by its operation. In the post-war period, when many returned soldiers will certainly take up the search for minerals, it is anticipated that the value of this legislation will be realized even more fully than it is today.

Regulations were gazetted under the Mining Act to protect the interests of lessees and claimholders who, through the deficiency of available manpower resulting from the war, might be in danger of having their holdings forfeited for non-compliance with the labour covenants. These provisions, which were first brought into force in South Australia, have since been introduced into the legislation of other parts of the Commonwealth.

A detailed geological study of the copper fields of the State has been made and the results of much of this work have been published already. Further reports have been prepared dealing with other fields and these are almost ready for publication.

Based on these investigations, and also upon geophysical surveys carried out by the Commonwealth at the request of the Government, drilling operations are being carried on continuously in the Wallaroo and Moonta districts.

A detailed study has been made of the Leigh Creek coal field, and a very large number of boreholes has been drilled., Much information has been obtained and published to show the mode of occurrence, the composition and the calorific value of the coal.

Close attention has been given to the principal deposits of phosphate rock occurring in South Australia; and, although it has

been found that the amount of high-grade rock suitable for manufacture into superphosphate is limited, it is now definitely known that there is available a very large tonnage of lower-grade material suitable for application to the land when finely ground, either by itself or mixed with an equal quantity of superphosphate. This mixture, when used in regions having an annual rainfall of over 20 inches, can do much to alleviate the present shortage of phosphatic fertilizer required for the dressing of pastures, and the mixture is being offered for sale at a price corresponding to its agricultural value.

The Department of Mines has been strengthened by the appointment of an additional geologist who has had extensive mining experience. This officer has carried out much of the work connected with the examination and sampling of the phosphate rock occurrences, and is now engaged upon a similar study of the State's resources of talc, which is in great demand for use in munition making and industry generally. He has carried out work on graphite also, the need for this mineral being stressed by wartime demands.